



Harriet Ann Jacobs

1813 ~ 1897

Writer, abolitionist, and educator Harriet Ann Jacobs was born into slavery in Edenton, North Carolina in 1813, the daughter of slaves owned by different families. The story of her life, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, was published under the pseudonym Linda Brent in 1861. While Harriet used fictitious names to protect the identity of family members, the following account of Harriet's life uses the names scholars believe to be the true identities of her literary characters.

As a child, Harriet enjoyed a close-knit family life with her mother Delilah, her younger brother John, and her carpenter father Elijah. After her mother's death in 1819, Harriet went to live in the home of her owner, Margaret Horniblow, who taught her to sew, read and spell. Harriet and her family assumed that Miss Horniblow would emancipate her. However, upon Miss Horniblow's death in 1825, she bequeathed Harriet to her three-year-old niece, Mary Matilda, the daughter of Dr. James Norcom. Eleven-year-old Harriet and her brother, who had been purchased by Norcom, now entered the Norcom household. Within two years, Harriet was subjected to Dr. Norcom's unwanted sexual advances and Mrs. Norcom's vindictive jealousy. In 1829, forbidden by Norcom to marry a free black carpenter, Harriet chose to begin a liaison with Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, an unmarried white lawyer and future U.S. Congressman. Their union produced a son, Joseph, in 1829, and a daughter, Louisa Matilda, in 1833. Norcom renewed his advances, threatening to remove Harriet and her children from the security of their home in Edenton to a plantation if she refused to submit. Acting on his threat, Norcom sent Harriet to his son's plantation, Auburn. Before her children could be sent to join her, she ran away and went into hiding, first, at the homes of friends, and later, in the home of her grandmother, Molly Horniblow. Harriet hid in a small attic above a storeroom for six years and eleven months, despite Norcom briefly jailing her children, brother and aunt. In 1842, Harriet secretly boarded a boat in Edenton harbor and escaped to New York, where she worked as

a nursemaid for the family of Nathaniel Parker Willis. For the next few years, Harriet traveled between New York and Boston, eventually reuniting with her children. Harriet moved to Rochester, NY, in 1849, where she worked with her brother in the Anti-Slavery Office and Reading Room, becoming acquainted with Frederick Douglass, Amy Post and other abolitionists. The next year, Harriet returned to New York and employment with Willis and his second wife, Cornelia. In 1852, after evading several attempts by Mary Matilda and her husband to re-enslave her, Mrs. Willis arranged Harriet's purchase and she is freed.

Harriet began writing *Incidents* in 1853, at the suggestion of Amy Post, and completed her narrative in 1858. Harriet's first two attempts to have the book published failed when both publishers went bankrupt. Harriet purchased the plates of her book and had it printed "for the author" in 1861. The British edition, *The Deeper Wrong*, was published in 1862. During most of the 1860s, Harriet did relief work, first, nursing black troops and teaching, and later, assisted by Louisa Matilda, aiding freedmen in Washington, D.C., Savannah, GA and Edenton. For a time Harriet ran a boardinghouse in Cambridge, MA. Later, Harriet and her daughter lived in Washington, D.C., where Louisa Matilda participated in organizing meetings of the National Association of Colored Women. Harriet died in Washington, D.C. on March 7, 1897, and was buried next to her brother in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

For nearly a century, the authorship of her book was questioned, but a new edition published in 1987 by Harvard University Press established Harriet Ann Jacobs as the author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Since then, *Incidents* has become part of university curricula and has been translated into several languages. On May 17, 1997, Harriet Jacobs was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. A North Carolina Highway Historical Marker honoring Harriet Jacobs was dedicated on May 15, 1998, in Edenton.



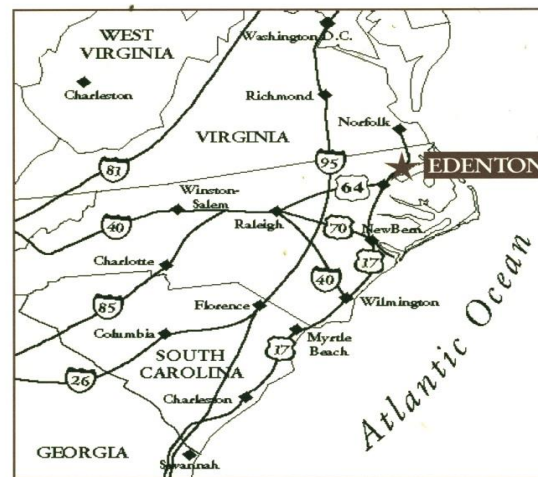
For more information, please contact:

Historic Edenton State Historic Site
P.O. Box 474, 108 North Broad Street
Edenton, North Carolina 27932
(252) 482-2637 / Fax (252) 482-3499

Schedule:

Closed major holidays.

Groups are required to make advance reservations.

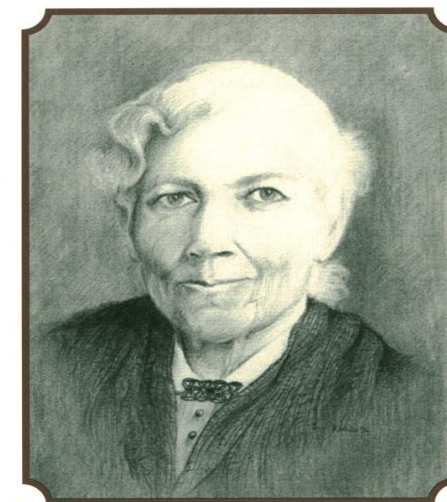


PRINTED THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE
JAMES IREDELL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



Harriet Ann Jacobs

1813 ~ 1897



SELF-GUIDED TOUR
OF HER
EDENTON YEARS
1813 – 1842

WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

North
Carolina
HISTORIC
SITES

Historic Edenton State Historic Site

1. Historic Edenton Visitor Center

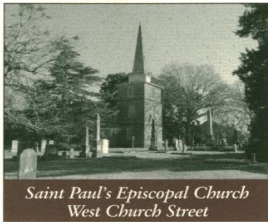
Information, tours, audio-visual program, gift shop and various exhibits, including one on the life of Harriet Jacobs, are available here. A North Carolina Highway Historical Marker, dedicated May 15, 1998, commemorates Harriet Ann Jacobs, fugitive slave, writer and abolitionist.



Historic Edenton Visitor Center
108 N. Broad Street

2. Saint Paul's Episcopal Church & Churchyard

Harriet writes that her children were baptized at Saint Paul's Church where their great-grandmother, Molly Horniblow, was a member. In the churchyard, near the sidewalk along Church Street, is the grave of Dr. James Norcom.



Saint Paul's Episcopal Church
West Church Street

3. Former site of Martha Hoskins Rombough Blount's home

(A gas station now occupies this location) Mrs. Blount was a white friend of Harriet's grandmother, Molly Horniblow. The home was Harriet's second hiding place after her escape from Auburn plantation.

4. Former site of Dr. Norcom's home

(Edenton Baptist Church parking lot) Harriet came to live here at about age twelve after her owner, Margaret Horniblow, willed her to Dr. Norcom's three-year-old daughter in 1825. Built in 1766, three rooms of the house are preserved today at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

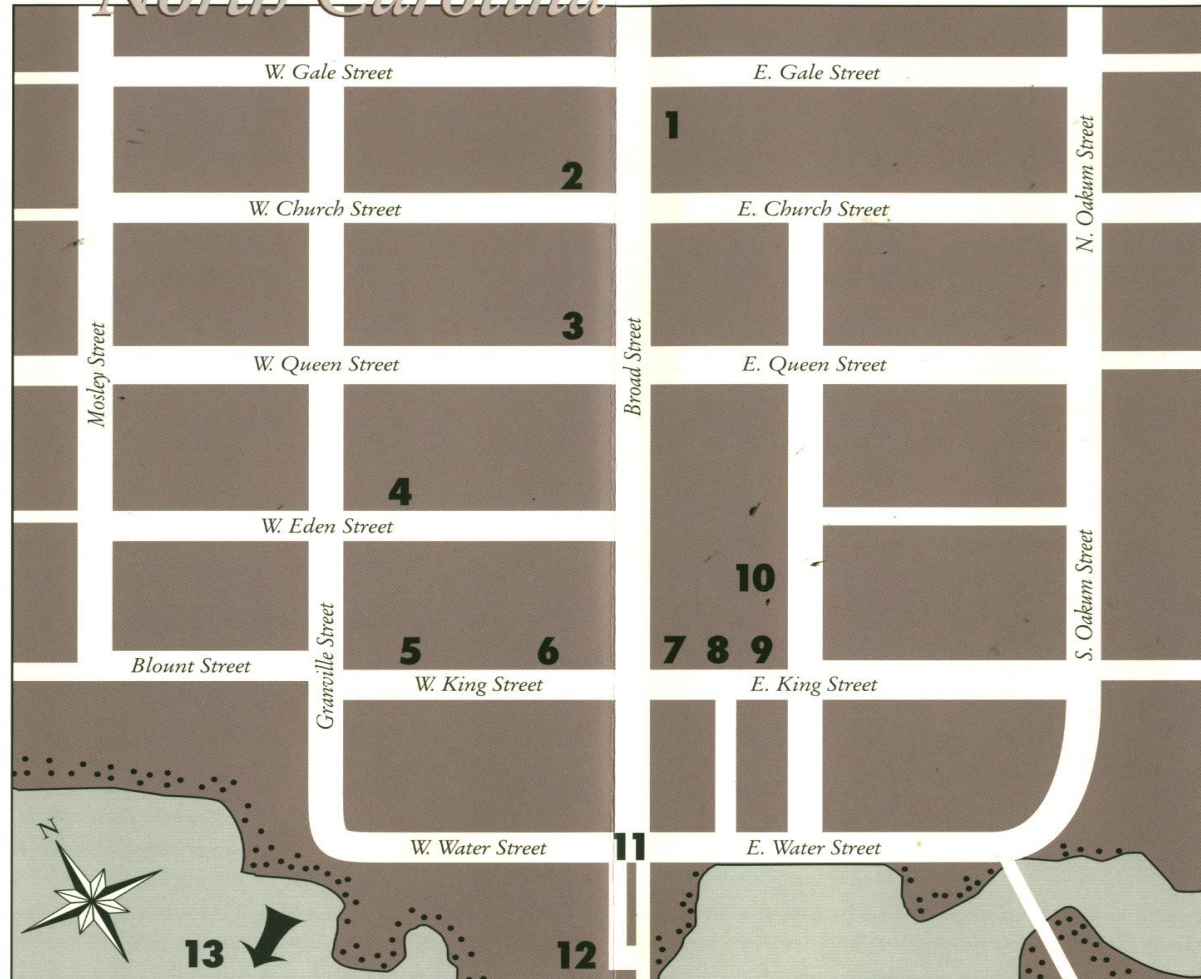
5. Former site of Samuel Tredwell Sawyer's home

(Lower end of W. King Street) Harriet writes that Samuel Sawyer was the father of her children, Joseph, born in 1829 and Louisa Matilda, 1833. An Edenton lawyer, Sawyer was elected to the United States Congress in 1837.

6. Former site of Molly Horniblow's home

(Upper end of W. King Street in the fenced parking lot area) Harriett writes that she hid in a small attic above a store-room in her grandmother's house for six years and eleven months until her escape to the North in 1842. Harriet sold the house in 1892.

EDENTON North Carolina



7. Former site of Dr. Norcom's medical office

(105 East King Street) The present building was built in 1882 as a law office.

8. Former site of Horniblow's Tavern

(Chowan County Office Building now occupies this location) Harriet lived with her family until her mother's death in 1819. At that time Harriet was sent to live with Margaret Horniblow, who taught her to read, spell and sew.

9. Chowan County Courthouse

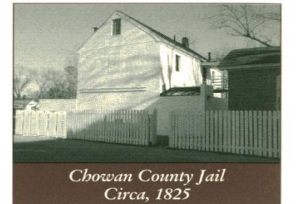
In 1828, Hannah Pritchard purchased Molly Horniblow after her owner's death. Miss Pritchard petitioned the Chowan County court to emancipate Molly on April 28, 1828.



1767 Chowan County Courthouse
East King Street

10. Chowan County Jail

Harriet writes that after her escape from the plantation, Dr. Norcom jailed her young children and brother for two months and her aunt for one month, in an effort to force her out of hiding.



Chowan County Jail
Circa, 1825

11. Former site of the Market House

(Intersection of S. Broad and Water Streets) Goods of all kinds were sold here, including slaves. Here on January 1st, hiring day, slaves could be offered out for hire by their owners for the year.

12. Edenton Bay Harbor/Maritime Underground Railroad site

Harriet writes that she escaped from Edenton in 1842 by way of the Edenton Bay. This means of escape by water became known as the Maritime Underground Railroad. Aided by sympathetic seamen, Harriet sailed north. Her goal was to reach New York and reunite with her daughter. Harriet remained a fugitive slave until her freedom was purchased in 1852.



Maritime Underground
Railroad Site
South Broad Street

13. Snaky Swamp

(Wooded area west of Edenton Bay) Harriet writes that with the help of friends she was concealed in the swamp for two days while a hiding place was prepared at her grandmother's house. "As evening approached, the number of snakes increased so much that we were continually obliged to thrash them with sticks to keep them from crawling over us."